

**STATEMENT OF SENATOR LISA MURKOWSKI  
UPON ELECTION AS VICE CHAIR, SENATE COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS  
JULY 19, 2007  
WASHINGTON, DC**

**Mr. Chairman, more than a month has passed since our colleagues and all of Indian Country awakened to the news that Senator Craig Thomas, the Vice Chairman of this committee left us.**

**It is a tribute to Senator Thomas' leadership and respect in Indian Country that weeks after Craig was put to rest the tribal leaders who appear before this committee continue to express their shock at his sudden loss and extend their condolences to his family.**

**Each of us on the dais has a slogan that we hope will connect us to our constituents. Craig Thomas encouraged the people of Wyoming to think of themselves as "Craig's friend." He encouraged his colleagues to think of him the same way. I think all of us in the room who knew Craig Thomas regard themselves as "Craig's friend." I certainly do.**

**So let me say to my friend, Craig --- you left us too soon --you left me with big shoes to fill -- and I will do all that I can to faithfully carry on your work.**

**Chairman Dorgan often refers to this committee as one of the most nonpartisan in the Senate. Perhaps we are this way because the mission of our**

**committee to ensure that our Nation's promises to our first people are upheld.**

**Perhaps it is so because of the groundwork laid by the leaders of this committee who have come before us. Senator Inouye, Senator Campbell, Senator McCain, Senator Thomas to name a few. Their leadership and mentorship has been an inspiration to me since I came to the committee in 2003.**

**I welcome our tradition of bipartisanship, our focus on the needs of Indian country, our commitment to listen to tribal leaders and our respect for their wisdom. I pledge to uphold these traditions.**

**Our tribal leaders are the descendants of those who governed this Nation before the arrival of European, and in Alaska's case, Russian influences. You honor us by appearing for this committee. I respect the sovereignty of your Nations.**

**At times it seems that the problems that face our Native communities are perplexing – chronic diseases like diabetes, the rates of youth suicide and cancer, educating the children, maintaining peace in our communities, improving housing and infrastructure, the new challenges of global warming, creating economic opportunities.**

**Working together, I am optimistic that we will see progress. That progress will not occur because we make it so. It will occur because we empower our tribal leaders to make it so.**

Those who know me well know that I am a realist. I don't care to promise more than I can deliver. But today I would like to challenge my Chairman, my colleagues and all who care about Indian country. The Indian Health Care Improvement Act bill that we have reported is the product of thousands, perhaps tens of thousands of hours of work by our tribal leaders. It is a bill that all of Indian Country can be proud of and indeed one that enjoys broad support from all corners of Indian Country. It is time to put the Indian Health Care Improvement Act reauthorization on the President's desk. I look forward to working with you Mr. Chairman and our colleagues to make that happen on our watch.

I am honored and humbled by my selection as the 11<sup>th</sup> Vice Chairman of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, the first woman, as well as the first Alaskan to serve in that role. We have a lot of work to do – let's get down to business.